

*Everything Will Be Different....Bringing Mark Schultz's 'A Brief History of Helen of Troy' To
Life*

An Honors Thesis (HON 499)

by

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Abstract

Adolescence is a trying time for everyone. When I think back to my middle school and early high school days, the memories are usually met with a cringe. When reading *Everything Will Be Different...A Brief History of Helen of Troy* I was taken by the universal experiences that we all face in high school; having a crush on an older boy, fighting with your parents, feeling insecurities about your appearance. However, Charlotte's experiences have many added layers to them that make them appear foreign to us--the loss of her mother and the influence of the social media culture we have all come to know have mixed together to make a dangerous cocktail. Through the telling of the story of Helen of Troy, we watch Charlotte weave her own version of reality and have to face the consequences of her actions.

While working on the dramaturgy and actor's packet for the production, I decided to focus on 4 different aspects: the loss of a parent, porn, the discourse of sex and love, and the story of Helen of Troy. In my performance I tried to incorporate all that I had researched to make a three dimensional, living, breathing person.

Acknowledgements

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I also need to thank my Mom and Dad for supporting me in everything I do. Thank you for teaching me how to dream.

Table of Contents

Project Analysis Statement.....	1
Dramaturgy Actor Packet.....	6
Concept Statement.....	6
Loss of Parent.....	7
Porn.....	10
Sex v. Love.....	13
The Story of Helen of Troy.....	16
Works Cited.....	19
Production Media Flash Drive.....	Physical Supplement
Production Script.....	Physical Supplement

Project Analysis Statement

The first time I read Mark Schultz's *Everything Will Be Different...A Brief History of Helen of Troy* I knew I wanted to play Charlotte one day. Charlotte's journey is full of the adolescent angst that is so recognizable to all of us, but her experiences are also so foreign to most. At the core of the script, the story is about a teenager and her father trying to deal with the recent death of their matriarch, and that is what I tried to bring to life when I was working on how to play Charlotte.

When we first started rehearsals, I made Charlotte larger than life. She was manic, shift, moody and all over the place. I found her objectives in every scene and worked to make them as strong as possible. Throughout the process, I started to par back on the choices I had made. I would veil the emotional outbursts she had, to make them as internal as possible. I worked to make her less of a caricature and a well rounded individual.

I used a lot of image work while creating Charlotte. I thought of her on a teeter totter-- unable to balance but almost enjoying the emotional ups and downs she experienced. At the beginning of the process I would even teeter my weight back and forth between my feet, especially during the scenes that involved Harry, Charlotte's father.

One thing that really helped inform many of the choices I made with Charlotte were the dynamics I found through working with the other actors. The play never has 3 characters onstage together at once, so when we would rehearse all of the scenes with Harry, Franklin etc. I would get to see the individual relationships arc in a more specific way. In Charlotte's scenes with Harry, I focused more on verbs; I wanted her actions to be clear. Their story to me is at the heart of what Charlotte is struggling with, so I wanted Charlotte to be as direct in what she wanted as possible.

In Charlotte's scenes with Heather, I worked to create a movement vocabulary that fit the dream world she had created for them. We decided as a production that Heather was an actual girl at Charlotte's school whom she had seen around but didn't personally know--their interactions were the dream like manifestations of her longing for a friend/confidant. I noticed that Charlotte says the least in her scenes with Heather and lets Heather do the bulk of the talking. I let Charlotte become more passive and eager in those scenes because I wanted to show a mirroring of her relationship with Heather to that of one with a mother and her daughter. Their last scene together was a tough one for me to try to figure out, because Charlotte and Heather began kissing before her father walks in and shatters Charlotte's fantasy. As I read and worked that scene over and over I began to start to justify her actions within my own interpretation of Charlotte. Heather brings up the kiss, which Charlotte initially denies but then eventually gives in to. We see Charlotte become increasingly uncomfortable and eventually wet herself because she is scared and confused. Throughout the show, we watch Charlotte talk about sexual longing as a sort of "proof" that someone loves her--she didn't believe there is a separation between sex and love. When she is faced with the merging of a sexual love with a mother/daughter love, she becomes overwhelmed, and that's why we see her wet herself.

Charlotte's relationship with her counselor Gary was also a complicated one for me to work on. Charlotte so desperately wants someone to pay attention to her and care so she tries to elicit any sort of emotional response she can out of Gary--be that positive or negative. In Charlotte's interactions with Gary, I let Charlotte's emotional life be a little more colorful than it is with the other characters. Charlotte wants to push Gary's buttons, so allowing her to be larger than life was a more solid choice in order to achieve that goal. When it came to scene 8, which we decided was a sequence Charlotte had dreamed up, I tried to change my body language and

speech pattern as much as possible. I wanted to make Charlotte submissive the way she is with Heather to clue the audience into the change within her psyche.

The relationship that Charlotte has with Freddie is complex because it's the true sign of her unravelling. I struggled the most in bringing the scenes with Freddie down from an over the top place to a place where Charlotte was more human, because I found those scenes the hardest to relate to. Her inability to read his social cues made it challenging for me because I wouldn't be able to react to what I clearly knew was happening. I had to quiet my "Maggie" brain and see the interaction through the eyes of a 15 year old girl desperate for the cute boy she'd been fantasizing about to talk to her.

Finally, I think Charlotte's arc with Franklin was the saddest to me. I used a similar way of thinking when it came to Franklin as I did with Gary, which was to try to push as many of his buttons as possible. In their final scene together, Mark Schultz writes that "there is the feeling something horrible is about to happen." I wanted that moment to be full of a strange stillness that was off character from what we had seen of Charlotte the whole play, and fed off of the awkwardness of the moment between Charlotte and Franklin.

Overall, this part was challenging for me because I am an actor who keeps all of their emotions at the surface--it's easy for me to get overly emotional and yell, cry, etc. If I had allowed myself, this role could have been almost unbearable to watch and a sort of "over dramatic" interpretation of the script. However, I worked really hard with Emily (my director) to make sure that it didn't happen, and to keep Charlotte's emotions bubbling just under the surface. It led to a fantastic payoff and audience response at the end of the show, when we finally do see Charlotte break down. I heard from many people in the audience that despite all of the

horrible things Charlotte as a character had done throughout the course of the show, in the last scene where I was crying alone on the bed, they wanted to run up onto the stage and hug me.

Most of this information can be found in my script--on the backside of the pages I took rehearsal notes throughout the process. The script can be found in the back pocket of the binder.

I think that my Dramaturgical work made a big difference to the final product as well. I created a detailed actor packet that we passed out to the cast on 4 specific subjects relating to the script: Porn, loss of a parent, sex v. love and the story of Helen of Troy. I then took my findings and translated them to 3 large dramaturgical boards that were placed at the entrance to the theatre so the audience could get an idea of the cultural and thematic elements that are present in the show. One of them was interactive, and the audience was told to write what they knew about Helen of Troy and then interpret that to what she was like as a human being. One of the audience members said they went home after the show and thought about one of the dramaturgy boards and it made them very emotional. They were referencing the specific loss according to gender board that depicted the different ways loss can affect father/sons, mother/daughters, etc. The student was a male who didn't identify with Charlotte as much as some of the females who were in our audiences, but because of the specific gender board he was more empathetic to how he would react in her situation. Those dramaturgical boards can be found on the flash drive.

Overall, I don't know if I have genuinely ever been as proud of a finished product as I am of this production. We got fantastic responses from audience members, and I am incredibly grateful to have shared this experience with the cast and production team. One of the best parts of working on this thesis was the personal responsibility I had--the reason the show was happening was because Emily and I wanted it to. So often as an actor, you audition for projects and hope you have the opportunity to be asked to join the cast. In this case, I found a script and

role that I was passionate about, found a director and asked if she would want to do it with me. So often within the department of theatre and dance we are told to “create our own work,” and this thesis gave me that opportunity. It was a learning experience I will cherish as I move through my career as an actor.

*Everything Will Be Different....A Brief History of Helen of Troy Actor Packet **

Concept Statement

“I like theater that’s brutally honest. Really, truly brutally and/or viscerally honest. I really respond to plays that are unsentimental but emotionally gut wrenching, that are not easily digestible, that grab me by the throat and won’t let go, that have a certain violence to them akin to Rothko’s definition of sensuality as “a lustful relationship to things that exist.” Plays that are conscious of the overwhelmingly dazzling and awful beauty of what it means to be alive and human. Plays that are not afraid to go to dark and ‘ugly’ places.” -Mark Schultz

This quote from playwright Mark Schultz is what Emily used while putting together this production. The goal of this actor packet is to show the honest truth behind some of the ugly subject matter at the center of this play. Finding truth and humanity within the things that make us uncomfortable or are considered “taboo” are what inspired the research and conclusions found within this actor packet.

*A digital version is available on the flash drive that includes hyperlinks

Loss of a Parent

“Maybe that’s how the war really started. A little girl. Alone in a room. And her dad. Menelaus. In the next room. Crying.” -Excerpt from *Everything Will Be Different.....A Brief History of Helen of Troy*

At the center of this show, we see Charlotte trying to navigate the world as a 15 year old girl who is deeply grieving the loss of her mother. To explore the idea of losing a parent in early adolescence and the way that can change the way we grieve, check out the information below.

In order to understand exactly what’s going on in an adolescent’s mind (ages 13-15) when experiencing grief I implore you to check out [this](#) article titled *The Effects of Parental Loss Through Adolescent Stages of Development* by Jade B. Spielman and read through chapter 3 (page 29 in the PDF). To sum it up briefly, Spielman explains how during early adolescence, a child begins to expect to leave their parents, not for their parents to leave them. When a parent dies, it takes away all opportunity for the child to come to their own conclusions about their independence. Because early adolescence is when most children go through puberty, physical growth and body image also is greatly affected by a loss of a parent during this time. We see all of these ideas present in Charlotte’s behavior in ...*A Brief History of Helen of Troy*.

A quote pulled out of the same article really speaks to the way Charlotte describes her loss in her report, and I wanted to share it:

“Sometimes I feel like I am 5, and I just want to crawl into my mother’s lap, staying there, curled up, oblivious and ignorant to the rest of the world. At other times feel so worn out and sad, like I’ve experienced too much to take anymore. I feel like I am 80. The thing is, though, that sometimes all of that doesn’t have to do directly with my dad’s death. As a teenager, life is so difficult (especially for

our generation and the upcoming generations) that my dad's dying is just one more thing added to the chaos and turmoil in my life. At times I'm not upset about it directly, but it's one more thing that I have to deal with." - Ella, 15

We spend a lot of the show focused on the relationship between Charlotte and Harry, and we begin the story with an explosive scene that takes place 6 months after the loss of Helen. In *Death of Parents and Adult Psychological and Physical Well-Being: A Prospective U.S. National Study*, the gender dynamics between parents and loss is discussed; which can shed some light on why their relationship is so tumultuous. Out of the 4 combinations of child/parent relationships, the daughter/mother bond is the most intense. When a girl loses her mother, she has loss of general happiness as well as a loss of purpose and personal mastery. She also has a higher chance of developing a binge drinking problem. When a child loses the parent of the same gender, it leads to a large loss of self esteem and a confusion of who they are.

Continuing down that path, this article, entitled *Counseling Adolescents for the Death of a Parent: A Literature Review*, discusses how adolescents experience death anxiety similarly to the way adults do, but they are often unsure of how to cope with it. They often look to the other parent for permission to grieve, and when that is not there feel guilty for their feelings. Surviving fathers are less likely to take over the maternal roles of the household - boys and girls are often found to have more difficulty interacting with a surviving father after the death of a mother because the father will want to protect their children from harm by limiting the discussion of the deceased, which unknowingly harms the child's ability to grieve. This review also states that grief in adolescents often looks like bursts of emotion (anger, depression) followed by stoicism, mimicking the way Charlotte interacts with her father in the first scene of the show. It also states that a sign that an adolescents grief is complicated is when they experience difficulty with peers

between 3 and 6 months after the passing of a parent--a thematic device used by Mark Schultz throughout the script.

Finally in this youtube clip, *How To Comfort a Grieving Teen*, we see Bridget Park discuss losing her brother as an adolescent. She describes how when someone says "I'm sorry," it made her angry because it acknowledges the death with pity rather than support. In the end, she gives positive statements that she wishes people would have said to her in order to celebrate her brother's life. This is seen in Charlotte's desire to talk to her friends, counsellor and brother about her mother's beauty and the way that she remembers her.

Porn

A large part of Charlotte's journey is her fascination with pornography--an attention seeking, scandalous cry for help, comes from a place of adolescent fascination with sexual expression. To explore the effects of porn on the adolescent, read below.

In *Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Online Material and Recreational Attitudes Toward Sex* by Jochen Peter and Patti M. Valkenburg, they discuss the way that research has consistently shown that porn presents sex as a physical, self indulgent and casual act between uncommitted partners and ignores the social and relational aspects of sexuality. This is harmful to adolescents who are having their first sexual experiences because they view sex as more of a fun activity than something that has social and emotional consequences. This reflects the way that Charlotte discusses sex with Franklin in their first scene together, as well as a few conversations she has with Heather as the play goes on.

In the article '*It's Always Just there in your Face': Young Peoples' Views on Porn*, Shelley Walker, Meredith Temple-Smith, Peter Higgs and Lena Sancu try to find the effects of porn on adolescents in their own words. They begin by stating that porn exposure from a young age has been linked to several harmful effects: earlier initiations of sex, poorer psychological well being (including anxiety, shame and confusion), less sexual satisfaction and lower rates of condom use. These traits, especially the first two, can be found in Charlotte throughout the show. Her strong desire to have sex, despite the fact that she's only 15, is present with every single male character in the show. We also see plenty of moments where her various anxieties, shame, and confusion appears in regards to having sex and the good/bad effects it could have on her.

That same article states that based on their research, many young women have concerns about a link between the content of porn that is being watched and their sexual expectations.

They worry that exposure to pornographic scripts that involve degrading women is a frame of reference for males that are influencing their desires. These women worry that the porn that is being consumed is what their male partners will expect of them when they have sex, and they believe often times its unrealistic. We see Charlotte fall into this pattern, but with the roles reversed--she has consumed these images but is not yet mature enough to understand the grandiose and exploitative way they display sex and thinks that the way those women act are what make them desirable to men.

In *The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research*, the repercussions that porn has on the development of adolescents as they come of age sexually are explored. It describes how in adolescence, reward-seeking behaviors commonly occur in the pursuit of money, novelty, excitement, and social connection, including peer-group acceptance, sexual activity, and substance use. We see many of these appear within Charlotte; excitement, acceptance and sexual activity seem to be her biggest driving forces throughout the play. It describes a Swedish study that showed that adolescents who consumed porn had a positive attitude about having casual sex with a friend, and a Dutch study that shows that there is a clear relationship between exposure to porn and viewing women as sex objects--regardless of gender. This would correlate with Charlotte's behavior; she describes herself as a sex object in her conversations with Gary because that's what the porn she is referring to illustrate her as.

The most interesting discovery I made in this section however are the quotes that come from real young people describing their experiences with porn.

Camille's quote, age 20, can be found in '*It's Always Just there in your Face*': *Young Peoples' Views on Porn*:

There's things like porn stars do that people talk about trying...things like two men on one woman at the same time...like simultaneous...I think that would be horrible personally. But pornography is making it okay. Boys think females should just do it because porn stars do it. (Camille, female 20 years)

The next two quotes come from *The Impact of Internet Pornography in Adolescents: A*

Review of the Research:

One participant described the messages that are inferred from porn as they relate to female body image when she said 'well, the girl should be small, thin, and you know...inferior...while the guy should be muscular and superior. (Haggstrom-Nordin)

[You feel] very unattractive...you can say that you aren't influenced by this, but no one can resist. You do want to have these ideal bodies. (Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson)

Sex v. Love

“Nothing could be less materialistic, or more sentimental, than a teenager buying brand new jeans and tearing them at the knees, because he wants to please Jennifer.” - Yann Dall'Aglio, philosopher in *Love--You're Doing it Wrong*.

Throughout Charlotte's journey of the play, we watch her fuse the idea that sexuality and beauty is equivalent to love and human connection. To look at how this ideology often dominates our modern society, read on.

In the article by J. Mark Halstead titled *Teaching About Love*, Halsted touches on the recently popular phenomenon of having emotionless sex. “It is sometimes claimed that sex has overtaken love as a source of inspiration in the popular press, popular songs, fiction and other forms of entertainment--even in Valentine's Day cards. A recent rather tongue in cheek newspaper article suggested that the problem with sex, especially really, really good sex, is that you might end up falling in love with your partner--and that would be a catastrophic thing to do; better avoid sex altogether than run that risk! Even among adults, I want to argue, the cynicism may simply be a cover for deep seeded beliefs about love.” Halsted goes on to discuss how this is a way that adults tend to “playoff” their true desires to have meaningful relationships in order to go play into social stereotypes and protect themselves from deep emotional hurt. We see this through Charlotte's insistence that she wants to have meaningless sex with Franklin, and then her fear and hesitation when he finally agrees to it.

Continuing on the topic of Charlotte's insistence that she wants to have meaningless sexual encounters, we turn to *Premarital Romantic Partnerships: Attitudes and Sexual Experiences of Youth in Delhi, India* by Jaya and Michelle Hindin. In their research, they spoke with adolescents in India about their experiences and attitudes about sex at their age. “Research

suggests that, for adolescents, being in school and having high educational aspirations, living with both parents and having self-efficacy to refuse unsafe or unwanted sex are protective against risky premarital sexual relations. On the other hand, poor academic performance; abuse of substances, such as drugs, alcohol and tobacco, access to pornographic films and other X rated materials; family instability are inversely related with lower-risk sexual activities.” This finding lines up with what we see going on with Charlotte throughout the show.

A large part of Charlotte’s intellectual discourse between sex and love apparently has a lot to do with the fact that she is female. In *Greater Expectations: Adolescents’ Positive Motivations For Sex*, it states “Compared with males, females considered intimacy significantly more important as a relationship goal and considered pleasure significantly less important...For e

expectations that sex would lead to intimacy, we found a significant interaction between gender and sexual experience. Participants with sexual experience had higher expectations that sex would lead to intimacy than did participants with no sexual experience.” It also went on to state that peer approval is often a determining factor in an adolescent’s desire to have sex, and stated that through their research they found that “young adolescents viewed intimacy, sexual pleasure and social status as important goals in a relationship, and many had strong expectations that sex would satisfy these goals.” This describes Charlotte’s longing to be included and popular among the kids at her school, and why she pushes the issue so much.

Finally, in this Ted Talk from Yann Dall’Aglia titled *Love--you’re doing it wrong*, Dall’Aglia talks about the ways that love and intimacy are an anxiety producing phenomenon in western culture. The departure from family structure being the focus of a marriage and its focus on forging connections between one another brought on a new set of circumstances that the western world still has yet to grasp. One quote in particular that struck me was this:

I negotiate my value every day. Hence the anxiety of contemporary man. He is obsessed: "Am I desirable? How desirable? How many people are going to love me?" And how does he respond to this anxiety? Well, by hysterically collecting symbols of desirability. I call this act of collecting, along with others, seduction capital. Indeed, our consumer society is largely based on seduction capital. It is said about this consumption that our age is materialistic. But it's not true! We only accumulate objects in order to communicate with other minds. We do it to make them love us, to seduce them. Nothing could be less materialistic, or more sentimental, than a teenager buying brand new jeans and tearing them at the knees, because he wants to please Jennifer. (Dall'Aglia)

Dall'Aglia describes the struggle at the core of the show, which is that Charlotte represents the anxiety and need for love that all of us face at one point in our lives. She is just in the thick of the adolescent struggle, which is all consuming.

Helen of Troy

“The most fascinating thing about Helen was her story. It was far better than she was. We do not see any real character development in her and have to regard her as a pawn of the gods. The larger story is involved with the people around her, their rise and fall. She herself seemed almost oblivious to the horrors that surrounded her.” ---*Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary*

For the full text of the story of Helen of Troy from *Women of Classical Mythology*, click [here](#). My abridged version is below:

Helen was born immortal, the daughter of the God Zeus and the Queen of Sparta, Leda. Leda was impregnated by Zeus while he was in the form of a swan, and that same night she had sex with her husband Tyndareus and was impregnated with his child as well. She had two children--Helen, the daughter of Zeus, and Clytemnestra, the daughter of Tyndareus.

Growing up, there was never any anger or jealousy between the two, apparently they were close that they swore they would die together. When Helen reached puberty, she was kidnapped by Theseus, the King of Athens. He wanted to have sex with one of Zeus' daughters before he dies. She was taken to Aphidina, where she was looked after by Theseus' mother Aethra. There, he took her virginity, even though she was publically considered a virgin.

After Theseus had accomplished his goal, he left and Athens was marched on by the Dioscuri. Helen's brothers found Helen and brought her home to Sparta, with her capture Aethra as her personal slave. Once Helen returned to Sparta, an avalanche of suitors arrived to court her. It seemed every red-blooded male in Greece wanted to marry her. They came touting their affluence, trying to win over Helen's mortal father Tyndareus for her hand. After getting each suitor to swear an oath to stand behind whomever Tyndareus selected and be ready at any time in

the future to defend the bridegroom against any wrong done to him in respect to the marriage, Tyndacrus chose Menelaus, the son of Pleisthenes.

Helen had little say in who she married. He was the brother of Clytemnestra's husband Agamemnon, and had wealth and power because of it. She soon gave birth to 5 children, Hermione, Aethiolas, Maraphius, Pleisthenes and Nicostratus. During the early years of their marriage, Sparta experienced a plague and Menelaus traveled with Paris to Troy to fulfil the oracles wish to stop it. Helen met Paris when he returned with Menelaus from the trip, and he stayed in Sparta while Menelaus unexpectedly had to travel to Crete for his grandfather's funeral ceremony.

While Paris was in Sparta, he and Helen fell madly in love. He was charmed by Aphrodite to make him irresistible to Helen, and he possessed manners and charm. Some say that Helen and Paris left Sparta the night after Menelaus departed for Crete. Paris had his own ship and Helen took many of her servants with her. Inevitably there were stories that made it look like Helen was forced to go, rather than wanting to. However, Aphrodite had cursed Tyndarcus that his daughters Clytemnestra, Timandra and Helen would be adulteresses, so Helen was fulfilling the prophecy.

They stopped at the island of Cranae, which is still in view of Gythium to consummate their relationship. They hadn't done so on the mainland, most likely because Helen hadn't morally wanted to have another man in the bed she stayed in with her husband. Apparently on the trip back to Troy they stopped all over the world and went to Egypt and Phoenicia. When they came to Troy, the Trojans (who hadn't like Paris much before) could only marvel at Helen as she came off the ship. At their wedding, it were as though Helen was marrying the city of Troy.

When Menelaus came back from Troy, the lovers had been gone for so long that there was no way that he could catch up with them. Agamemnon was furious at the dishonor that had been bestowed upon his family. Menelaus took a group with him to Troy to demand that Helen be returned. Priam, the King of Troy and Paris' father refused. When Menelaus came back to Sparta, preparations for war began. Former suitors of Helen were reminded of the oath they had sworn. Armies were recruited, ships were built, and the 10 year long Trojan war begins.

When we look at this story, we are able to see a lot about Helen in terms of what she represented, what she looked like, what happened to her, etc. However, we know very little about who she was as a human. Was she kind? Did she treat those around her with love? Was she a good mother? A good wife to the Paris? Was she a good leader? Was she loud or soft spoken?

These are all questions we could leave *A Brief History of Helen of Troy* with about Charlotte's mother as well. She is spoken of so highly and with such a magical quality, and yet we know no concrete facts or stories about her. This correlation cannot be coincidental when Mark Schultz was choosing to make Helen of Troy the metaphorical representation of Charlotte's mother for the show.

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